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ABSTRACT

An effective school library requires a good supply of books and periodicals, adequate furniture, sufficient space, and a trained person to manage the facility efficiently. In Asia, where educational facilities are often in short supply, UNESCO has established a Regional Center for Book Development and has made recommendations for future development in the use of libraries. Each village school should have some sort of minimal library facility to encourage students to do exploratory reading and to learn basic research skills. Simple designs can be used to modify existing school plants to provide shelving, a catalog, seating, and a work area for the librarian. Sample plans are provided. (EMH)

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# SCHOOL LIBRARIES

**Introduction**

An effective school library requires a good supply of books and periodicals, adequate furniture, sufficient space and a person trained to manage the facility efficiently. A library forms an expensive element of education and, thus, few countries of the Asian region have yet been able to provide the necessary resources for libraries from their already strained educational budgets.

There is, however, an almost universal determination to improve the present position—a determination which matches, at least in part, the moves for reform in science and mathematics education. Indeed the two situations are complementary for, without access to library material, it seems unlikely that the concepts of learning to learn—on which the reforms are based—can be fully developed.

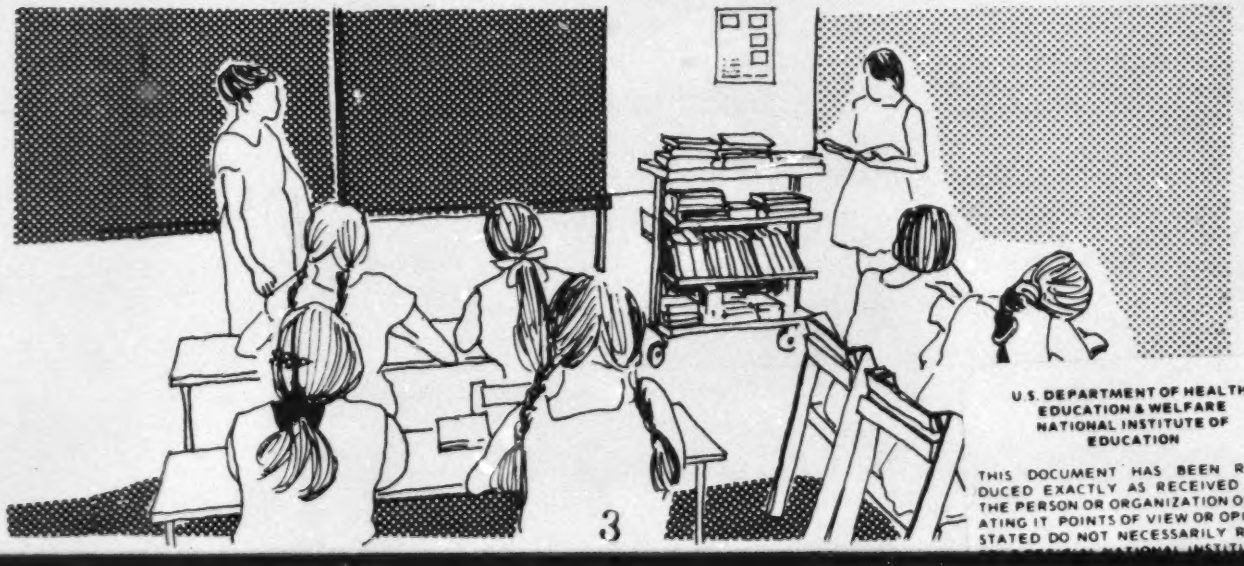
The provision of libraries to the schools of the region poses a problem already familiar to educational planners and administrators; namely, that of assigning priorities for development in situations where existing facilities are obviously inadequate. Different countries of the region have, for reasons that seem best to them, decided to approach the problems in different ways. Some have concentrated on text-book production and have invested little in either the training of librarians or on the construction of libraries. A few have provided library buildings while investing less in the training of librarians and the supply of books and periodicals.

It is only in the wealthier countries of the region that a balanced approach to the provision of school libraries has proved financially possible. In no country, however, is there lack of awareness of the total needs.

Of course, the main function of a library is not to provide a store of books, but rather a wealth of material which will enable the child (and, often, the teacher) to extend his or her understanding beyond that achieved through reading text-books prescribed for the class-room. Indeed, modern science teaching relies heavily, on the availability of a wide and up-to-date range of books, using which, the child can pursue topics as they arise.

The main problem is basic—the lack of suitable books. Local publishers are hampered by complex problems. Often, writing is unremunerative, production costly and publishing risky. The distribution of books is sometimes difficult as, outside the main towns, there are often few commercially viable retail outlets. In some countries, transport is difficult. Additional problems are presented by plural societies where books have to be published in a number of languages and scripts, resulting in demands for uneconomical short runs. Primary schools, housing most of the children receiving education in Asia, suffer especially in this latter respect, as education in the first year or two at this level is often in the mother tongue, which is not necessarily the national language. Secondary schools are more fortunate in that supplementary reading material can be more easily made available in a prescribed second language, such as English or French.

The problem of providing books has been thought critical enough to receive attention not only at national but also at international level. Unesco has established a Regional Centre for Book Development in Asia at Karachi and is sponsoring the Tokyo Book Development Centre, both of which have for some years been actively encouraging the production of general reading matter for children and suggesting, where



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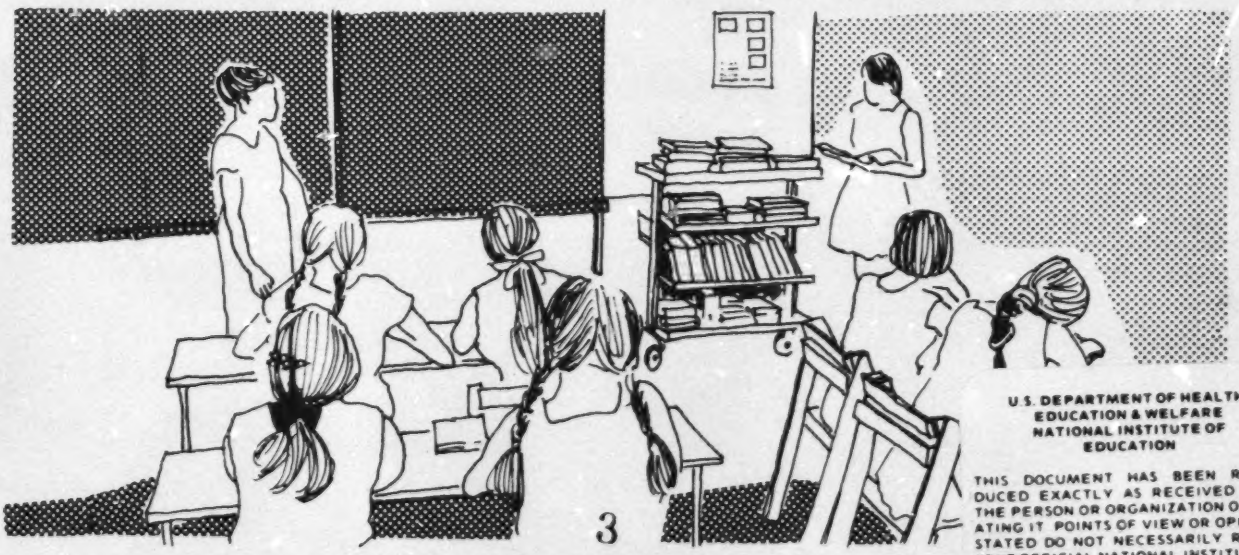

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Plate 1

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possible, the achievement of economies through co-operative publishing.

During a Unesco meeting of Experts on Book Development Planning in Asia held in 1968 in Singapore, several recommendations were made which are of interest and may provide pointers for the designer as to future development in the use of libraries in Asia:

"(a) ..the extension of school libraries to villages with the aim of having a library in every village school.

(b) Emphasis should be laid on the importance of school libraries in improving the quality of education.. Governments should adopt the principle of installing a school library in every school (at least 1% of the primary education budget and 2.1% of the secondary education budget might be appropriated for school libraries).

(c) School libraries should be used to provide services to the public where public libraries do not exist."

The problems connected with school libraries, however, continue. Books are often unevenly distributed and some schools have only very small collections. This is especially true of schools in rural areas. Where there is neither a trained librarian nor a trained teacher-librarian, books are often locked away in cupboards for fear of theft. Frequently a collection of books, once established, fails to grow and the incentive for children to continue reading no longer exists. Often the collection consists almost entirely of text-books. Finally, library periods are rarely time-tabled and thus there is little chance of access to the library in an otherwise fully programmed school day.

What is encouraging about the situation is the attention it is receiving in the countries of the region, in many of which, not only is book production and the training of librarians sharply increasing but also the design of school libraries being actively stimulated.

Against this background, the designer must be prepared to offer a wide variety of design solutions to meet the very different situations that have been described above. These solutions may range from the design of a complete, secondary school library to the provision of small book racks that can be squeezed into tightly designed, one-or-two-teacher rural primary schools.

**Libraries and the primary schools**

There can be little doubt that, not only in Asia but also in Africa and Latin America, the provision of library facilities at the first level of education presents a problem which, because of its sheer scale, is the most difficult to solve. It is at this level of education that there are by far the greater numbers of children and, for most of them, it is at this level too that education will terminate.

The need for accommodation of libraries in primary schools is to inculcate habits of reading which will

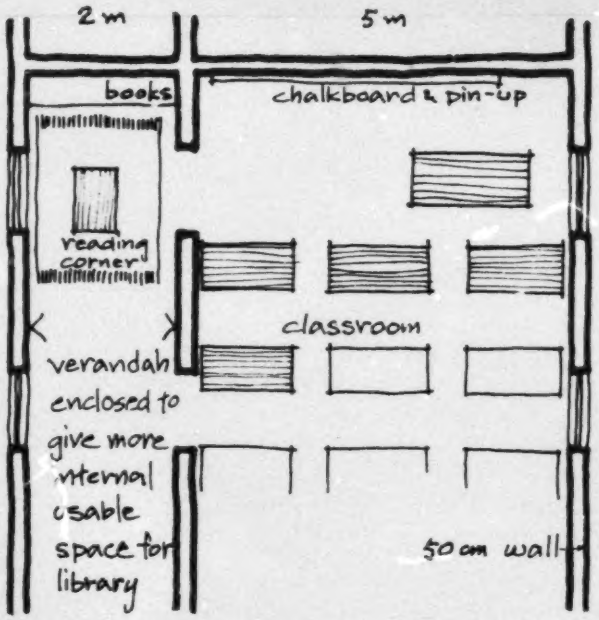



Figure 1

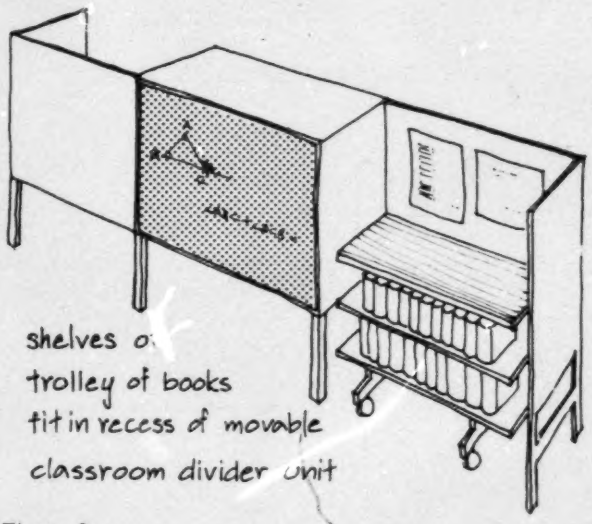



Figure 2

carry on into later life. This, it seems, given the books and the trained teacher librarians, might be made possible in one of three ways. First, in the few countries which are able to afford it, separate library accommodation can be incorporated in all newly designed primary schools. Secondly, and using an approach already adopted by some countries, schools can be provided with a library room even if it is a converted classroom or other space. Thirdly where no other space is available, small collections can be kept either in each classroom and/or on a trolley that can be wheeled from room to room. Any of these approaches is better than none. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the last two alternatives.

Perhaps one of the reasons why libraries are sometimes regarded as less essential than elements of the primary school is that the skills that can be learned are rarely, if ever, mentioned in curricula. Yet, by the time a child has received six or seven years of primary education, the following library skills should, optimally, have been acquired:

Lower grades: ability to handle and read books; understanding of borrowing routines; ability to locate material by subject; ability to select and use books independently.

Middle grades: ability to make and use alphabetical files and to use simple dictionaries; ability to select and use correct children's encyclopaedia volumes; some knowledge of library terminology; reading magazines using an abridged dictionary; understanding classification and the use of a simple card catalogue.

Upper grades of primary school: use of information file; bibliography making; note taking; use of magazine and poetry indexes; using almanacs and year books; using an unabridged dictionary; using other media — atlases, maps, globes, film strip etc. (depending on library resources).

It should be added that the acquisition of these skills can be measured by testing in much the same way as child development in any other subject area can be measured.

The methods used by teacher-librarians or librarians in assisting the children to develop library skills are varied and include the following activities:

Story telling; reading aloud; book talks; discussions; browsing periods; book games; dramatization; annotation; written and oral exercises; art from reading.

Ideally, some library periods will be timetabled and it should be possible for the teacher to take the whole class to the library which would thus have to be large enough, not only to accommodate the class but also the library material in it.

As the lower grades of primary schools in the region frequently comprise between 50 and 100 children. It would seem unrealistic to tailor the library to hold such large numbers. If use is made of trolleys or, alternatively, a good selection of books is kept in the classroom (Plates 1 and 2) then the acquisition of skills such as the ability to handle and read books and ability to select and use books independently, can be acquired in the classroom, leaving "understanding of borrowing routines and ability to locate material by subject" to be taught in the library.

If grades 1 and 2 each have an enrolment of say 70 to 80 students, a library to seat 40 children would be required. The arrangement also presupposes the availability of a second teacher or librarian in the library. Such a situation would be unlikely in small rural schools but in larger, urban schools will be easier to arrange. Often, parents of a child may, if they are familiar with libraries, be encouraged, through an active Parent—Teacher Association, to come to the school for a few hours each week to assist with library work.

The classroom collection of, at most, between 100 and 200 books, will probably be located in the corner of the room and it will reflect the special curriculum interests of the class and the age group.

Where the shortage of books is acute, and as has been explained above, such shortages are evident in most countries of the region, a compromise between the needs for a library as well as for a classroom collection can be met by arranging for the library to be partly "on wheels".

**The library in the primary school classroom.**

Two methods of accommodating the classroom collection (or a trolley of books on loan to the classroom from school library) are suggested in Figures 1 and 2. One of the two examples illustrated is suitable for use in buildings having classrooms of normal span (from 7 to 8 metres) and the other for the narrower classrooms.

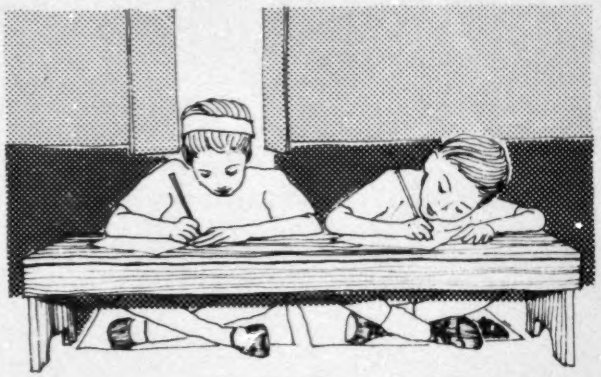


Plate 3

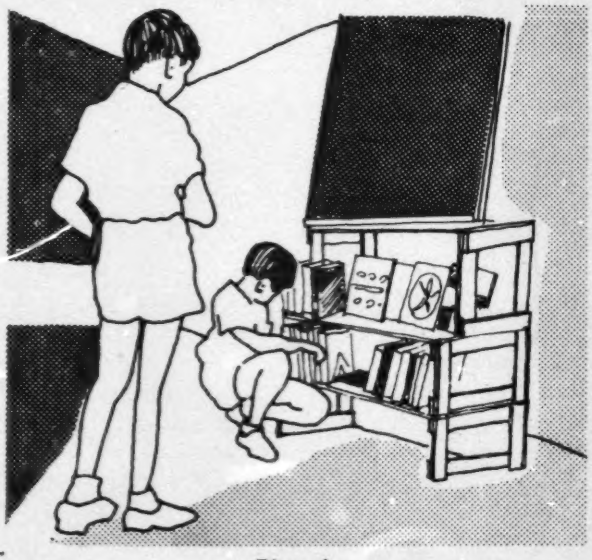


Plate 4

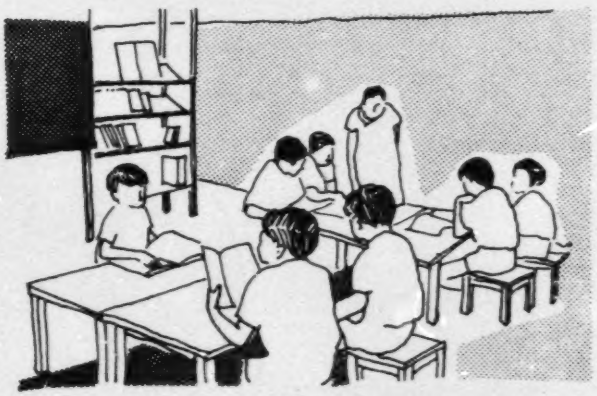
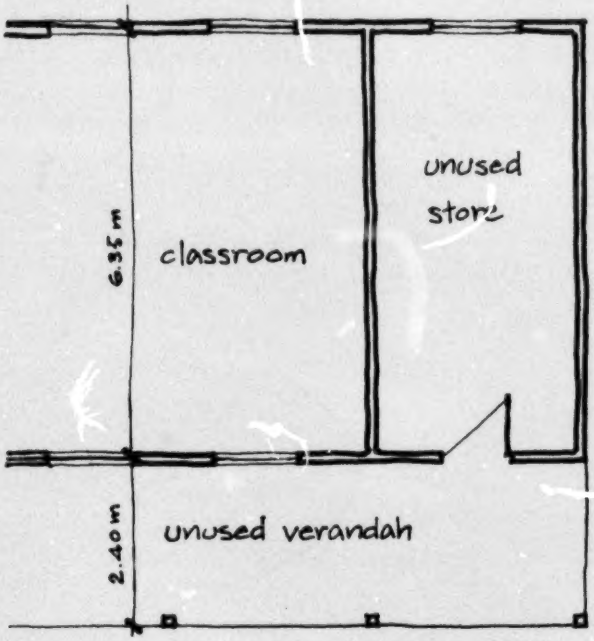


Plate 2

found in the mountainous areas of the Himalaya and the Hindu Kush. For the wider spans, simple adaptation of the furniture unit shown in Figure 2 is suggested. Where buildings have very narrow spans and external verandahs, then, as has been indicated in the previous chapters, the verandah can be incorporated with the classroom (instead of remaining sterile and unused for most of the day) and the space, thus enclosed, will provide excellent accommodation, for a book corner.

Shelving can be formed out of the primary school squatting table shown in Plate 3 and designed for use by children seated on the floor. Plate 4 shows these units arranged for library shelving.

**Unused spaces in the primary school used for a library**




typical arrangement in humid area

It is true with one exception—verandahs—that spaces in most Asian schools are overcrowded and thus the suggestion in this section is likely to be limited in its possible application. None the less, a survey of literature on library facilities, coupled with observations made in hundreds of schools, indicates that many libraries have started in what is essentially makeshift accommodation.

The verandah/store relationship is a common one and many schools have taken advantage of it to provide accommodation for a very small library. A verandah is both expensive and little used. Its main function is to provide shade in the brief periods between lessons, a luxury the provision of which is quite incompatible with the real needs for teaching spaces of various sorts, such as spaces for management, libraries, stores and the like.

Thus, where verandahs exist, they can confidently be used, at least in part, for library accommodations as is suggested in Figure 3. In hot-humid climates the arrangement should be such as not to obstruct cross ventilation through the adjacent classroom. The area of the accommodation shown in the figure is 30.75m2 and, as it is suitable for use by a half class of 20 children, the per place area is 1.54m2. With the shelving shown, some 800 books could be housed. This is a small collection but, of course, a very much larger one than is normally found in many of the region's primary schools. It could, in the space shown, probably be doubled.

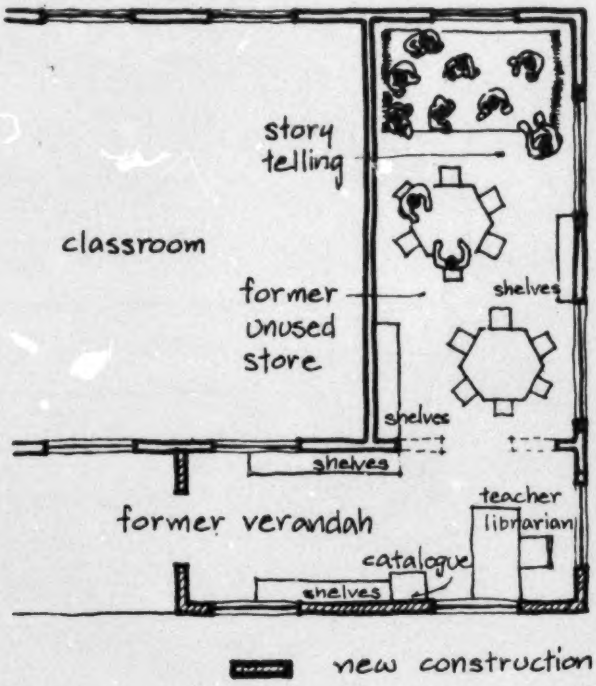



Figure 3

**The primary school library**

Where resources are sufficient to provide a properly designed and equipped primary school library, then a somewhat greater per place area than is suggested above would be needed. It seems likely in such situations, that the library will have the services of a trained librarian as well as a budget for a good stock of books and possibly some resource material such as atlases, globes, periodicals and perhaps even some audio-visual aids. These functional requirements have implications for furniture and working space that can be quantified as follows:

(i) Working area for the librarian

This should be large enough for a desk and chair and for shelves for books awaiting classification or repair (the wear and tear on books when they are in short supply is heavier than when books are more readily available). There should also be a storage cupboard for repair materials, catalogue cards etc., and a short length of work bench with sink and water. Usually the librarian will be single-handed and the desk will need to be located so that outgoing and

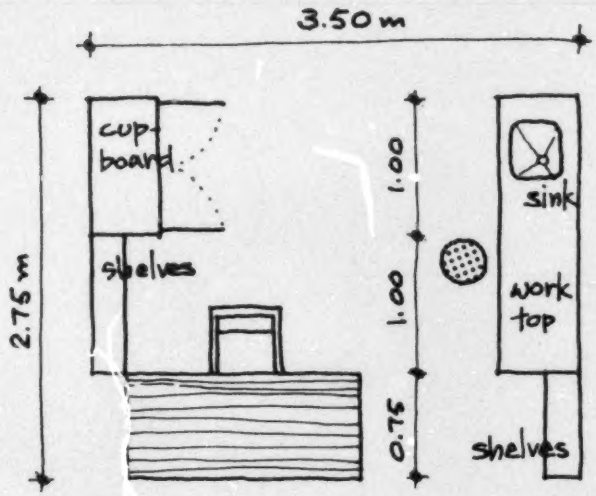



Figure 4

incoming books can be checked and the library kept under observation. A space open to the shelves and reading areas is thus to be preferred to a closed work room in all but the very largest primary school libraries. Figure 4 indicates the accommodation needs of the librarian.

(ii) Book shelving

The shelving for books should be of appropriate dimensions in relation both to the body sizes of primary school children and to primary school books, which usually tend to be larger than books intended for older children and adults. Suitable cross sections of shelving for 6 and 13-year-old children are shown in Figure 5. The dimensions of books are given as:

25 cm high x 18 cm wide
18 cm high x 25 cm wide
(illustrated volumes for the very young)
20 cm high x 13.5 cm wide for text-books all ages.
13.5 cm high x 20 cm wide

The best type of shelving will be adjustable, for standardisation in the field of book production, while no doubt desirable, has not yet been achieved. The length of shelving required will depend on the number of books. One metre length of shelf will hold about 60 picture books and about 30 text-books.

(iii) Display shelving

One of the problems of the young child is deciding "what" to read. Books conventionally arranged on shelves with only the titles visible will not help a primary school child, especially from the lower grades, to choose a book. What is needed are shelves on which books can be arranged so that the front cover, which is often a coloured picture, can be seen. The normal shelf, with adaptation for display is illustrated in Figure 6. Where some of the collection is exhibited in this way, more shelving is required.

(iv) The catalogue

As one of the aims of encouraging children to use books is to enable them to find what they want to read, they have, eventually, to learn how to use a card catalogue. In the lower grades of the primary school,

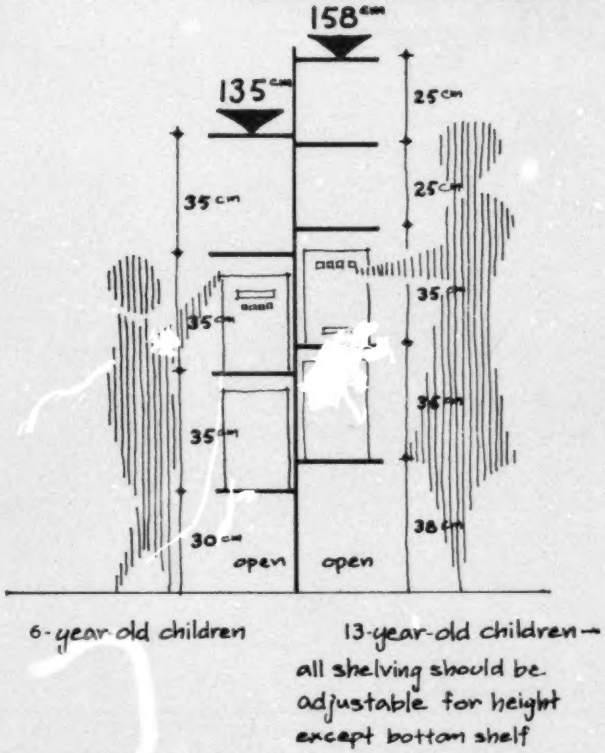



Figure 5

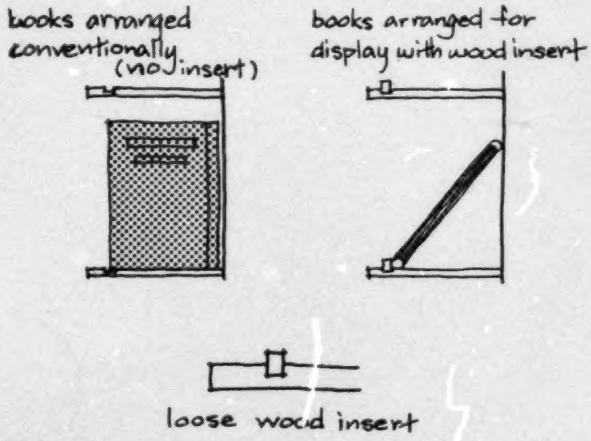



Figure 6

a general indication of the location of books based on content or some other criteria is all that is needed and can be given on sheets of paper pinned up on the library walls near the shelves. Pin-up boards should be liberally provided for this purpose. The catalogue itself is a standard set of drawers in which the catalogue cards are kept. For a small library perhaps five or six drawers will be sufficient. The important point is that they should be low enough for children, to look into them.

(v) Seating in the library

Very young children will usually be happy to look at books while sitting on the floor. Mats or squatting tables (Plate 1) are necessary in part of the library for this purpose. Standard classroom double desks can be used for the older children and arranged in a variety of ways.

The number of seats required will be optimal for 10% of the population of the school and in any case, for not less than one class of children. Where insufficient money is available then, as has been suggested above, the seating accommodation should be adequate for half a class.

Figure 7 suggests arrangements of the elements, i) to v) above in the form of primary school libraries for buildings with spans of 7 or 8 metres and for buildings in mountainous areas with much narrower spans. The 20 place library on the 7 metre span building has a per place area of 3.60m2, the library in the 5 metre span building has a 4.30m2 per place area.

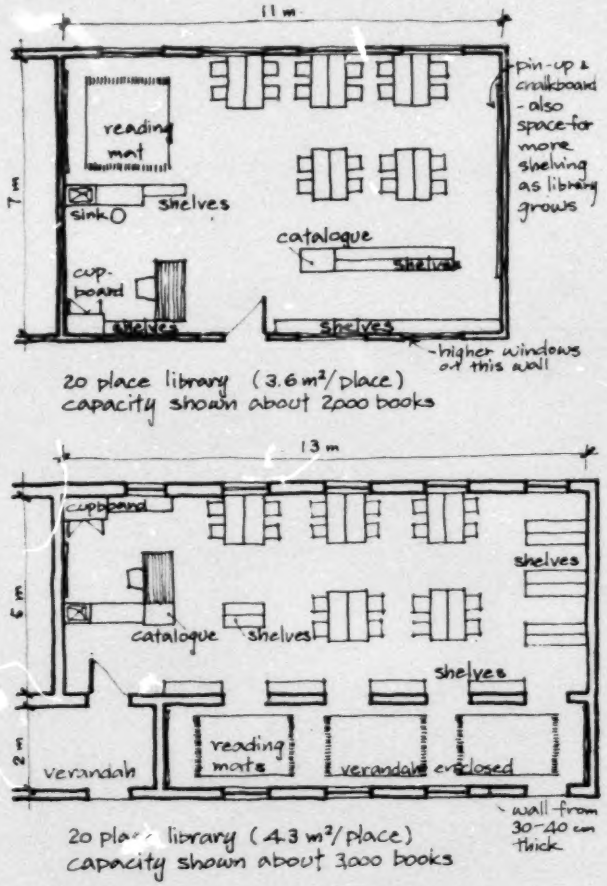



Figure 7

**Libraries for secondary schools**

The function of a secondary school library is to provide a wide range of resource material using which the students can:

(a) extend their reading beyond that of the standard text-books:

(b) undertake learning assignments set in the classroom and requiring a variety of books and reference material.

It should be possible for a teacher to discuss a topic with the students, to decide with them how it is to be studied and for the students to move to the library to complete the work using the library resources. In a secondary school, it is thus important to timetable library use. A double period can be assigned for a subject area, the first period in the classroom or laboratory and the second in the library.

In addition to this, individual use will be made of the library by students and by the school staff. There should thus ideally be seating accommodation for one class as well as for individual readers. The provision of chairs and desks for 10% of the student population will usually be found adequate for schools of 500 places (40 places in the library for one class and 10 places for individuals). In schools of 3,000 places, the figure of 10% could be reduced to 7% giving 210 places.

In India, where 600 to 700 place higher secondary schools are common, the National Buildings Organisation has recommended libraries to seat 42 students and accommodate 6,000 books. This would seem to represent a good target for libraries for secondary schools in many other countries of the region.

The basic differences between primary and secondary school libraries are the need for more desks and chairs for reading and working (mats on the floor are not appropriate) and, because of the larger numbers of books, and the greater likelihood of a full time librarian, a separate work room for receiving new books and preparing them for the shelves as well as for repairing damaged books. In addition, a larger card catalogue and more shelving will be required.

(i) Shelving

The mean standing heights of secondary students range from 146cm at 14 years of age to an adult stature of about 163cm. The shelving required will thus be quite different from that for primary schools, although the need for adjustment to fit books of varying sizes will be the same. Figure 8 suggests a

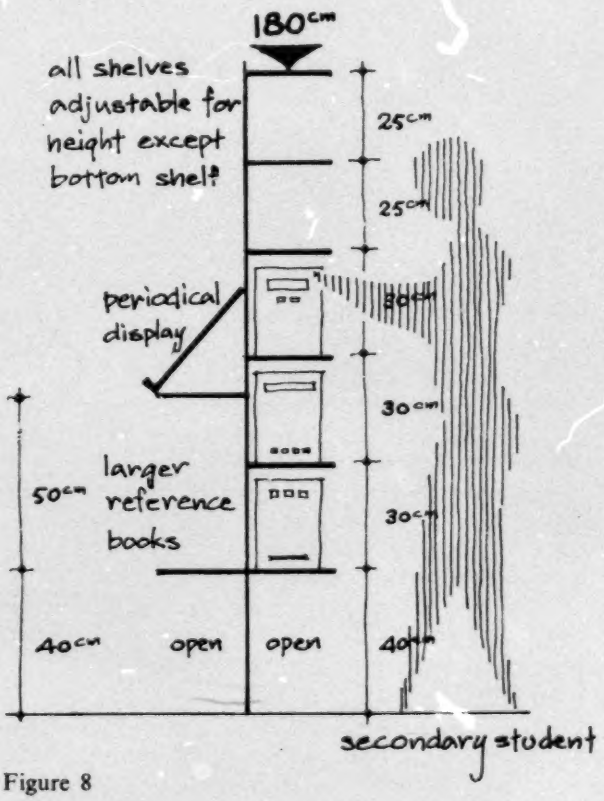



Figure 8

suitable profile. Note that the common practice of arranging books down almost to floor level is not recommended. It leads to aching backs and may encourage white ant under the plinth. The figure also indicates a profile for periodicals shelving and the larger reference books, etc., that are a common feature of second level school libraries.

(ii) Working areas for the library staff

Two areas are needed—a workroom cum librarian's room and an area for controlling activities in the main library, such as issuing and receiving books. The workroom accommodation can be similar to that shown in Figure 4 with shelving to accommodate about 600 books and an extra storage cupboard. The counter or desk at which books are loaned or returned should be about 2 metres long with shelving under the counter top on which returned books can be placed temporarily.

In addition, the library should have sufficient space for pin-up boards and various items of mobile or free-standing equipment such as dictionary and atlas stands, book trolley, card catalogue cabinet etc. Figure 9 illustrates an arrangement of a library to seat 50 students and accommodate 6,000 books. Note that, as in the primary school library, desks should be arranged so that light falls from the side of the student.

Finally, in respect of location of the secondary school library in the building, the question of possible future use by the community especially rural communities should be considered. Where community use is planned or can be foreseen, the library should be of easy access from the site entrance.

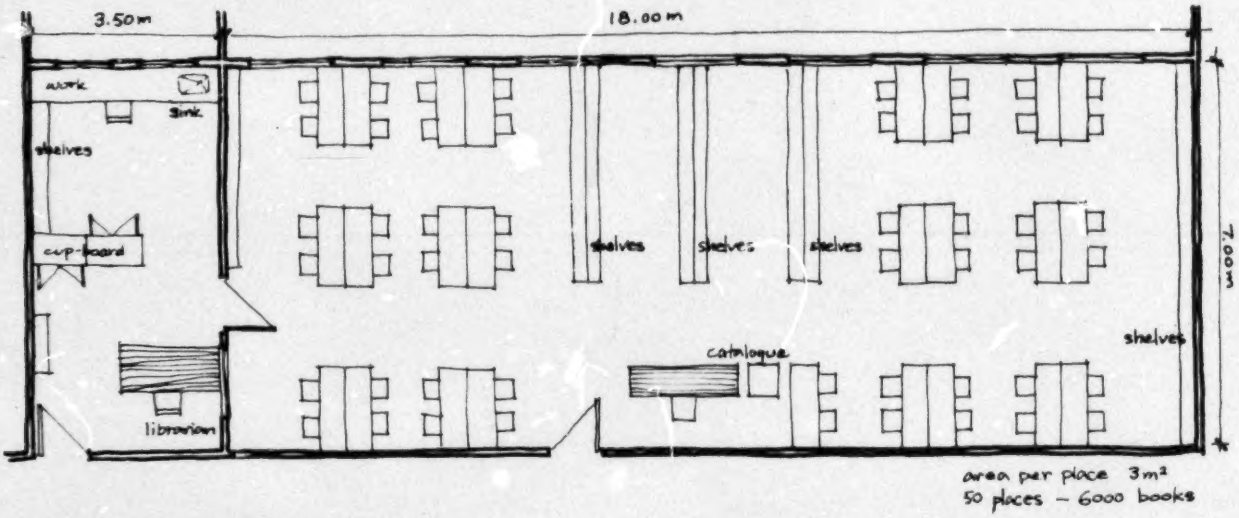



Figure 9

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